

What Gives Me Strength

**A Collection of Poetry by Youth
in California's Court System**

2005



**ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE
OF THE COURTS**

CENTER FOR FAMILIES, CHILDREN
& THE COURTS

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This third collection of poetry was produced in 2005 by the Administrative Office of the Courts, Center for Families, Children & the Courts (CFCC) in honor of two statewide conferences, *Beyond the Bench XVI: Strengthening Youth & Families* and the 2006 Family Dispute Resolution Statewide Educational Institute.

This booklet and the previous collections, *Can You Hear Me?* and *My Life*, are available online on the CFCC Web site at www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/cfcc/resources/publications/activity.htm. For additional print copies of this booklet or the previous collections, please call 415-865-7739, e-mail cfcc@jud.ca.gov, or write to the address below:

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It is our great pleasure to present *What Gives Me Strength*, the third collection of poetry by youth in California's court system published by the Administrative Office of the Courts, Center for Families, Children & the Courts. This booklet contains a selection of poetry submitted to us as entries in our third annual Children's Art and Poetry Contest held in 2005 to honor the two statewide conferences involving issues important to children and families in California's court system: *Beyond the Bench XVI: Strengthening Youth & Families* and the 2006 Family Dispute Resolution Statewide Education Institute.

The contest was open to youth of any age who have had experience with the court system. We received a tremendous response to the contest and had the difficult task of selecting these few poems to share with you. All the poems we received were excellent in their own ways, providing a glimpse into the lives of youth in the court system. The selected poems are simply a snapshot of the poetry entries and represent a range of ages and subjects.

Please note that the poems have not been edited for spelling or grammatical errors. We felt it was important to present the poems as they were submitted to us. In most instances the poems are arranged from the youngest author to the oldest.

We express our deepest appreciation to all the young poets who entered the contest and shared their thoughts and feelings with us. It was a truly enlightening experience for our staff and those who assisted us in selecting the poems for this booklet. We are also exceedingly grateful to the many individuals and court personnel who helped us reach out to the youths and facilitate their participation in the contest.

We hope you will enjoy the poems in this booklet, and we invite you to share them with others.



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Sad

Jairin

Age 8

I mice you mom
I mice you dad
I love you so much
it makse me sad it's
to bad it maks
mom and dad sad.

Jairin is in foster care in El Dorado County.

Note: We believe "mice" here is meant to be "miss."

My Strength

Jared
Age 12

My strength is like an animal,
Evolving,
Adapting,
It comes in different shapes and forms,
It comes in good forms and forms that can backfire,
It could be rewards,
It could be praise,
It could be bragging rights,
It could just be the fact that I see my parents smile,
But if my strength stays the same too long,
It takes a good hard slogging,
Since it's not the only thing that changes,
My strength can come in ways to take my mind off things,
Reading interesting books
Attending certain classes:
Curricular or extracurricular,
And having fun with my friends,
Sometimes my strength can come from my brother,
When I'm around him,
I always know there is someone to hug,
Someone who sometimes is in the same boat as me,
Someone I can depend on,
Even if he is only four.
These are my strengths,
But they can also be my weaknesses.

One of Jared's family members has filed a discrimination claim against a school district and the entire family is "waiting on tenterhooks" according to Jared. Jared painted the picture on the cover of this booklet, which is of snow crocuses, a hardy flower that brings the first bright colors of the coming spring, often when the ground is still covered in snow.

My Strength

Patty
Age 13

It comes from friends
Who are with me till the end.
Who can make me smile,
and make me feel worth while.

It comes from family
who I love happily.
A place to run to,
a place to love you!

It comes from teachers
who see I have many talented
features,
and make me push forward,
and don't want me to go lower.

It comes from dreams
that makes things better than it
seems.
Something to give you hope
a place where you never hear, "NO!"

It comes from heros,
who taught me not to have fear
to just reach for my dreams
because there near.

It comes from my brothers
who I love like no other!
To stick by there side
and help them through life.

It comes from everyone
and everything
that influence me!

It comes from me
and being the best I can be!
It comes from the heart
need I say more!

Patty does not remember any specific times she was in a courtroom herself but believes her birthmom may have been because of drugs. She says, "With just a couple of facts of my (birth) parents, I try my best not to feel anger. Even though it was their fault, I went through a lot of pain and many unanswered questions. If they never got into that stuff I wouldn't be here at this very moment . . . , I too went through a lot!" Patty has been in the dependency system in Merced County.

Best Friends

Rebecca

Age 14

My prayer is to let you
know my love is so true
My hope is that you'll see
Nobody could have done better for
me

Together as one
We had so much fun
You're my strength, my hope & my
peace
without you my life I would release

We go throughout time
Our hearts entwined
with one another
You're my best friends, not any others

As I sit here thinking about the times
we shared
It's so easy to see how much we all
cared
As we laughed out loud
We were so proud

You're my best friends
We knew it would never end
& even though we're far apart
Both of you will always be in my
heart

Now I sit here reminiscing
I know I'm not the only one missing
The good old days
People don't always go their own
separate ways

And I wrote this to tell you
You give me strength, hope & peace
You're my best friends so please

Don't forget we laughed out loud
Don't forget we were proud
Don't forget we're still best friends
Don't forget it will never end

Rebecca dedicates her poem to her grandparents and says she loves them. Rebecca entered juvenile hall in Yuba County for the first time in August 2004 and returned in May 2005.

My Baby Sister

Steven

Age 15

As I walk into court I see my baby sister,
I know what I did was wrong,
I am really going to miss her,
When I see her saddened face it gives me strength to bear.
No matter what I did or said I know that she will care,
And as the judge gives me my sentence her face starts to glow
because this time she knows I don't have to go,
She runs to me when I walk in the door
It seems that what I do effects her
So with the strength she gives me I will hurt her no more
I try and I try to do what I said I would do
but I end up failing and my baby sister wonders
if what I said was true
I am so very sorry for what I did to you
I pray and I pray that one day you will forgive me for the
things I choose to do.

Steven is currently on formal probation for assault with a deadly weapon, assault and battery, and gang enhancement. He has been incarcerated by the Santa Barbara County juvenile system many times since age 14. He says that he "has been to court more times than I can count [and is] currently enrolled in a juvenile court community school." Steven must complete 100 "good" days to graduate, and if he violates one more time he will go to a juvenile boys' camp.

Will You Ever

Pamela

Age 15

I don't think you will
Ever fully understand
How you've touched my life
And made me who I am

I don't think you could ever know
Just how truly special you are
That even on the darkest night
You are my brightest star

I don't think you will ever fully comprehend
How you've made my dreams come true
Or how you've opened my heart
To love and the wonders it can do

You've allowed me to experience
Something very hard to find
Unconditional love, that exists
In my body, soul, and mind

I don't think you could ever feel
All the love I have to give
And I'm sure you'll never realize
You've been my will to live

You are an amazing person
And without you I don't know where I'd be
Having you in my life
Completes and fulfills every part of me.

Pamela has been in the delinquency system in Sutter County. She "first got locked up at age 13 and I've only been locked up 6 times but it feels like a life time. At age 14 I went to my first placement in Redwood City. I ran and now I am locked up in [in a juvenile] camp and hopefully getting out in November to return with my mom. Wish me luck."

The Stage of Life

Stephanie

Age 15

The lights shine and the crowd sits still.
The world ends and my life begins.

Guarded by that fourth wall that
parts the audience and I.

Complete freedom to hate and freedom to love,
just love life for what it is, a stage.

And when the curtain falls I am left alone
to deal with life with out that wall to guard me.

Then the crowd cheers and it gives me the strength I need
to hold on until the next time that the lights shine and the
crowd sits still.

Stephanie lives in Los Angeles County.

The Little Girl Who Gave Me Strength

Delia
Age 15

There was a girl,
Who cried to me,
opened my doors,
so I can see.

Changed my life,
so many ways,
gave me the power,
to find my strength.

Now 10 feet tall,
when I was nothing,
now proud to say,
I am somebody.

This little girl,
so young, yet smart,
walked in my life,
melted my heart.

For the blazing fire,
lit in her eye,
all the fears,
just made me cry.

See I was there,
in her position,
living life,
with something missing.

My future goals,
all my pride,
that main person,
on my side.

Thinking life you just live it
till you reach this length,
but see this little girl,
gave me my strength

“My court experience was one of the hardest things I’ve ever had to go through. I felt like it was a set-up, a system with no way out. Probation officers, court dates, its hard. But I guess the only way out is to grow up, [and] you can only grow up only when you’re ready. You can be 18 years old, but that doesn’t make you grown, till you step up to the plate and take responsibility. All my court experience has taught me a memorable, valuable lesson. For the better of myself.” Delia is from San Diego County.

What Gives Me Strength

Joseph
Age 15

My Strength is something that I will
never forget or I will regret having it.
To me strength comes when it is needed
and a person knows how to use it.
Strength is something that builds up
inside of a mind to do whats right.
Strength comes from things around
a mind that forms a ability
that prides around it and
strengthen its weaknesses that
needs to be cured and everything
around it is secure and untouch.
Strength is armed for battle.

Rivers
Age 9

When we play
It gives me strength and
Helps me feel like strength
And Energy.

Joseph and Rivers are brothers who have been placed in the same foster home in Los Angeles County. Their social worker says that “they have so much inside that could be built into blooming poetry, and they feel very special to participate. Thank you for motivating them.”

I Am

Shalet

Age 16

I am a unique young woman,
Fighting the world alone.
I cry for help
but the cry is silenced.
I was a mistake,
but now I am a gift,
I remember I was afraid of life without mom
But now she is gone and I fight alone.
The battle is tough but I will continue to strive
towards excellence.
The long road to success
will be conquered with flying colors.
I have the key,
which is my strength.
My strength will open the doors

Shalet is a student at Butte County's Table Mountain School, a court community school for youths in juvenile hall. This poem is one of many published in *Unlocked Thoughts: An Anthology of Poetry and Art*, which the students published in 2005.

Drugs Aren't Everything

Cavanoff

Age 16

My love for you will never end
Endlessly you brake my heart again

Giving me away should have been a sin
The drugs you did was not pretend
By giving your life to these drugs again
Will only mess up my life again
One sniff wasn't enough
To end your on going pain
I thought you loved me but I must be insane
Not knowing what you did only brought me
hurt and pain
If time could stop so we could change some
things
I would turn into an eagle and put you under
my wing
to know now your clean changes everything
But in my head I think what will a relapse
bring?

“My court experience was stressful but in the end it was all worth it because they never gave up on me. No matter what from assaultive behavior to just not listening at all. I’m glad they helped me [as] I got off probation last April and now I’m doing [well].” Cavanoff was in foster care as a child because of his mother’s cocaine abuse and he later became involved in the delinquency system in Los Angeles County. His mother has been drug-free for over five years, and he says that both his experiences in foster care and his mother’s drug abuse have given him strength.

Ghetto-Tactic Expressions

Reginald

Age 16

My motivation that sustains me thriving,
Is the melody of an instrumental.
Passion and tender devotion,
From dependable flesh and blood.
The pleasure of recreational entertainment.

My inspiration
Spiritually is God All Mighty Himself.
Mentally are the illustrious historic memories
Of astonishment
Emotionally is the echo of an alluring euphony
Or the whispers of a dainty black woman.

My strengths are provided by the omnipotence
Of autonomy, maturing into
The prerequisites of a personal universe.

The boulevard of cognizance that can
Escalate into tangible
Endowments of assistance into the inevitable.

The desire to withstand a newborn 24 hours
So I can establish additional volumes to
The commonplace trials and tribulations of a
Psychopathic existence.

The aptitude to sacrifice
Individual pleasures and again possess the
Contradiction of what was fumbled and ascertain contentment.

The vigor of native tongue expressions
And the observation activity can drag around.

Reginald was admitted into the juvenile justice system in April 2005. Despite the district attorney's recommendations, the presiding judge decided to place Reginald in the San Joaquin County juvenile probation camp. [The judge] considered this a "blessing."

While in camp, Reginald has shown interest in various art forms but loves poetry. Reginald said, "I love to write, but I didn't know I could do *this*" (regarding his "Ghetto-Tactic Expressions"). Camp has given Reginald the tools to better himself and experience new activities.

In reflection, Reginald has said, "That day the judge was on my side. The D.A. wanted to put me away, but the judge gave me a chance. That one chance is all I need."

The Tree Outside of My Window

Micah

Age 16

Time ticks on and on with the cry of the crow
As I have shared it with the tree outside of my window
I first came in and it was nothing but a twig
Now it is full, healthy, and big
Day after year we shared a mutual beauty
And together overcame our mutiny
Now the time has come that I must leave
And leave behind my beautiful tree
But as I turn around it is as I fear
Down my cheek runs a single tear
The representative of so many things
Whether inatimate or being
For the good times, the bad times, the laughs and the crys
The happiness, the Hurt, the Joy, and the lies
The warmth and the coldness, the pride and the boldness
The memorys and the Pain, the Love and the disdain
The Faith that has Followed and the Pride that has been swallowed
And the time that I have had to grow
With the tree outside of my window

Micah is in the juvenile delinquency system in Amador County. He wants the reader to know that “this is a poem of a young boy coming into C.Y.A. and how he has come to terms to respect himself and his feelings. And after his healing he gets paroled and notices the tree that has been growing with him his whole stay and that tree represents how little and weak he used to be but how healthy and strong he is now that he is a young man leaving Y.A.”

What Gives Me Strength

Procton

Age 16

The strength in my Heart is the strength in my Mind.
The strength that I got won't leave Next Time.
My mental Attitude tells me what to do and Freedom
also gives me Strength.

The Length of my size makes me rise.
I could Bend my strength in different ways, that takes me to better days;
It's like being re-born again and for the World to come to an end.
Strength is like winning a race—and if I know what Gives me Strength;
then I could ask God to take me to this Place where I could look in the
Mirror and see my Face—and my Family, like my Mom, Dad, and Grandma
gives me strength.

The High Priority of Strength is my understanding of Life.
What also give me Strength is my Name and it will always stay the same.
Some people don't know what gives them strength—and what else gives Me
strength is my great Mind; it's very fine—and turning my life Around and
growing up makes me understand that I am becoming a Man.

Sooner or later I'll know—I will be in the Place that I'm in right now, so
that's how I know—I have to turn around my life and killing or harming people
don't have to be The Way any more—because that's how I know—God will open
up His Heaven's Doors and That's What Gives Me Strength.

Procton has been in the court system since age 4, initially as a dependent child of the court for abuse and neglect. At age 11 he committed vandalism (his only sustained petition) but has been in the delinquency courts for almost six years and is presently in the juvenile mental health court. Procton is doing much better now and trying very hard to go back to his [relative's] house. His caseworker says that Procton writes poetry as an outlet and that the “positive reinforcement of this contest has been a catalyst for his turnaround.”

My Home

Raymond

Age 16

When I wake up in the morning I see the white wall
I know for a fact that I'm still in Juvenile Hall
I wish I were still asleep so I could keep my dreams
My dreams are about being at home and not in the criminal stream

When I was younger my mom saw me as a shining star
With a great future not waiting to far
My mom keeps crying day and night
Hoping and praying that I follow the light

But I'm older and her dreams have been burned
"I'm sorry," is all I can offer her in return
Maybe someday I will learn not to yearn for the things that hurt me in return
Till then I will keep making the wrong turn.

Now I am lying on my bunk
Looking at my life and seeing how much I am a flunk
Drugs and Alcohol is what I usually have on my mind
Now I'm trying to change to leave it all behind

God is the only one that can see
The good and maturity that lies deep down in side of me
Next time I think or feel like doing something bad
I will just remember what I could have had

So whenever I am on the go
I always stay on the low
Keeping eyes behind my back
Waiting for someone to attack.

Strength is just a funny word
Something that most people have never heard
But if you ask me what gives me strength
I will always reply, “Memories of being in the Clank.”

Raymond has been in and out of juvenile hall in Butte County since 2003. He says, “My experience has been one I will never forget and one I hope to repair in the future.”

What Gives Me Strength

Matthew

Age 16

What gives me strength?
Knowin what I want in life
Its something out of authoritys sight
Those people don't believe
The things I can achieve

Me knowin I can prove them wrong
Gives me a lot of strength,
And its very strong

When I don't get believed in,
it pushes me harder, that's
Whats makin me smarter.
That's what gives me strength!!!

Matthew has been in the delinquency system in San Bernardino County for "quite a while" and recently was caught with drugs after leaving placement without permission. He says that he has seen the courts "three or four times" and that this is the last.

Of the Wild Mind

Students of Condor Pod, Table Mountain School

Waking up to realize your life is just a lie,
Scattered thoughts fade into my mind.
Under the moon heated in passion,
I am merciless to the world,
Cruel to myself and my loved ones,
Stagnant like a pond alone in the dark.
And all I've seen was little sparks,
Confusion, lost in the wilderness
As the cold rising passion emerged.
I am taking the boat of dream through
The sea of loneliness.
Soul-shocked passion comes from within,
The sun is frozen from the wind.
I really come from a place full of freedom,
A place where no one is hurt.
The world Is filled with cleverness and lies, yet
Nothing will crush me
on this mountain of confusion.

This poem was written by the students of Condor Pod at Butte County's Table Mountain School, a court community school for youths in juvenile hall. This poem is one of many published in *Unlocked Thoughts: An Anthology of Poetry and Art*, which the students published in 2005.

Welcome Inside My World

Students of Eagle Pod, Table Mountain School

Welcome inside my world where I'm surrounded
by strange faces.

Where existence is way too hard, where I'm
locked up waiting for a single card . . .
where life is constant paranoia. The truth is I
don't belong, not sure of where I belong.
The truth is I'm fragile inside. The truth is I keep
trying to escape.

Welcome inside my world where my shadow is
like a shy silhouette, delicate in the wind.
As crazy as it sounds, it's not what it seems.
Deep down inside, I'm in my own little world,
as if I was reborn again into a three year old child
growing up too fast.
I feel the breeze on my skin and the shadow
behind me saying it's OK. Am I asleep?

Welcome inside my world and listen to me, for my
opinions and mind are free.
My shadow is dark and deep. In it my secrets I
keep.
An unexpressed life is lonesome and solitary with
no one by your side,
away from everyone and everything you hide.
Open Up! I am bigger than life, but less than dirt.

Welcome inside my world.
I laugh when I cry. I laugh when hate comes my
way.
I cry when love pushes me away.
I feel like my feelings will drown out life when
they are expressed.
As ridiculous as this may sound, I am my biggest
enemy.

Welcome inside my world of confused fury, and
broken trust like the reek of musk.
I feel like rushing waterfall. I catch myself
trying not to cry. Listen!
Deep down inside I feel hurt, disappointed, upset,
unhappy, scared, shy and ashamed.
My heart says it was meant to be. Reality says
set it free.

Welcome inside my world so bright and shiny and
sometimes dull,
delightful and cheerful but always whole.
I walk with my head high above and don't forget
I'm here.
Life is universal trouble beyond the mumbled
screaming images
chasing me here and there trying to be accepted
with no one there to catch me slipping through,
always on the go.

Welcome to my world where the underside of my
wings are filled with hope
waiting to be turned upside down.
Can you see me Now?
Welcome to my world where the underside of my
wings are hidden from the world.
I hide then even though they are the most
beautiful part of me. Am I clear to You?
When will this confusion end and when will me
and my old life mend?

Welcome to my world, I know who I am and what
my name is.
Nothing anyone says will ever change me . . . I am
love.

This poem was written by the students of Eagle Pod at Butte County's Table Mountain School, a court community school for youths in juvenile hall. This poem is one of many published in *Unlocked Thoughts: An Anthology of Poetry and Art*, which the students published in 2005.

To the Source of the Flow

Nathaniel

Age unknown

On the road that I have taken,
one day, walking, I awaken,
amazed to see where I have come,
where I'm going, where I'm from

This is not the path I thought.
This is not the place I sought.
This is not the dream I bought,
just a fever of fate I've caught.

I'll change highways in a while,
at the crossroads, one more mile.
My path is lit by my own fire.
I'm going only where I desire.

On the road that I have taken,
one day, walking, I awaken.
One day, walking, I awaken,
on the road that I have taken.

Nathaniel is in the delinquency system in San Luis Obispo County.

What Happens Next

Tiffany

Age 17

Here I sit heart of broken glass,
Hoping what I did could be put in the past.
I try to think, my hands get cold
I try to speak, my mind goes dull
This new strange feeling is new to my soul
My heart & mind both seem so full
I'm scared so much, court next week
What to do
What to say
My word's won't work
Not one way.
Will he listen, does he care
Will he see that I am there
All I can do is pray he'll be fair

Tiffany has been in the juvenile system in Placer County since 2000. She says that her “experience with the court system is that it is made to be a very uncomfortable situation (although that’s probably a good thing because it’s more reason to not return here). The court ‘lingo’ is hard to understand also. The one thing that truly upsets me is that the minor doesn’t really get a chance to speak. Sometimes there’s more to what’s going on then just the paperwork. Mind you, I’m a single mom with a 4-month old son [and I’ve] done 42 days already for a curfew violation, and there’s little sign of release any time soon.”

Sinful Prayer

Maurice

Age 17

Heavenly father please hear me tonight
I need so much guidance to live my life right
Sometimes the pressure is so hard to bare
I often wonder if anyone cares
How can I wake up and face each new day
Knowing I have to live my life this crazy way
Heavenly father please forgive all my sins
I want to change but where do I begin
Help me resist the wild life I desire
Give me the strength to stay away from the
 mighty gunfire
Please god bless my family whos eyes
 silently plead
for me not to go out as they all watch
 me leave
God bless my mother who cries every night
Worring Ill be killed in yet another
 gangfight
Heavenly father please answer my prayers
Let me know if your listening up there
When will it end? What is it all for?
to prove to my homies yeah Im down
 Hard core
Sometimes I wonder how ill I die
by a bullet wound in my chest or a
 knife in my side
Heavenly father please here me tonight
give me the strength and courage to
 live my life right

Show me the way God show me the light
Help give my heart peace so I dont have to
fight
Thank you for your forgiveness Lord
and always being there and most
of all thank you for listening to this
sinful prayer

Maurice remembers court experiences from a very young age; he entered foster care in Santa Barbara County at age 3 when his mother passed away in a car crash. He first entered the juvenile delinquency system at age 11 for being in a gang-related fight. He was on probation until age 14, and then returned at age 16 for involvement in another fight. Maurice's probation will end once he graduates from his current program in a juvenile detention boys' camp.

What Gives Me strength?

Brandi

Age 17

It is difficult to describe
The type of strength I've got
Which is why I chose to tell
What my strength is not

My endurance comes not as Sampson's did
With tresses great in length
It takes much more than a great hair-do
To let you know what gives me strength

My force is not like that of Hercules
As a present from the gods
It takes much more to give me strength
Than tough abs and a rock hard bod

My power does not come from books
though knowledge is divine
What good are books and reading
If you can't read between the lines?

The kind of might that I possess
Is not like any other
For there is no greater strength in life
As that of a daughter and her mother

"I have been locked up three times in my life. My first and second charge was grand theft auto of my mom's car. I'm currently locked up because I failed to appear in court for a review hearing. I have been here for a month and I have about a month remaining before my release. Luckily, I don't have extensive court experience. However, I have learned a lot about myself and about life since my arrest. Also, I have developed a closer relationship with my family. I feel that I will be much more prepared to lead a positive life and be a good example to people around me when I leave this facility." Brandi was in the delinquency system in Yuba County.

Primos Hermanos por Vida

Jose

Age 17

I sit and think about the times we had,
Of playing baseball at my pad,
I love you so much and always will,
You are like water it beats and its still,
I wonder if you could hear when I talk,
Or see me when got arrested by the cops,
We had our bad times,
But most were good,
I was always on your side through our childhood
I think about you night and day,
But when night falls I sit and pray,
I ask god to unite us again,
But all I get is same answer again and again,
Sometimes I cry,
Only when I am alone,
But most of the time I take my anger out at home,
By doing that,
I know I did wrong,
I lost respect of others,
But especially my mom,
So Primo hear me out in my tears of pain,
I tell you this,
I am ashamed,
But only of myself for the actions I had made,
I just want to see you one more time,
One more day,
As I finish this poem tears fall from my eyes,
I ask you this,
Why did you have to die?

Jose entered juvenile hall in Sutter County the first time in October 2004. He finished his program and was released in July 2005.

Life Through My Eyes

Cooper

Age 17

At one time I was careless
Getting high was my life
Not knowing the impact
Caused me to die
Slowly but surely
Deterioration inside
If I stopped to think
I would have just tried
To get together
Put my head on straight
But I felt so alone
Nobody to relate
I lied and I stole
Whatever I could take
But my family held on
And did it for my sake
Without their support
I would have emotionally stumbled
But instead of a fall
I just tripped and then stumbled
I almost hit
What they call rock bottom
And at that point
Satan would have said I got him
Thanks to precious love
I rose
That one phone call
Brought me to my toes
Now I know
The greatest strength
Comes when I am sober

Now that I found God
My life has started over
That one last chance
You wish that you could have
I was given
If I follow the right path
I was shown the light
Its up to me to follow close
What gives me strength
Is the thing that I need most
Life, love and sobriety
And they are all so close
Here I am
Sitting in jail
So many times before
I failed
This is what it took for me
Before I was blind
But now I see
What gives me strength
Is passion to succeed
And get on with my life
Because I love to live free

“I’ve been to court over ten times and I know exactly how the system works. I’ve stolen cards, broke into houses, smoked weed, smoked meth and all around screwed my life up. I didn’t have enough strength to hold on to my life while I was high, but now that I’m sober I can look back on the mistakes I’ve made and make the right choices for the future. My experience in the court system isn’t good but its provided me with what I need most in my life. Sobriety. I am one of the few that have actually learned from what’s happened. Now I have enough strength to set out on the right path while sober thanks to the court system, because I never would have been able to do it on my own.” Cooper is in the delinquency system in Del Norte County.

When I Needed You Most

Allison

Age 17

You left me when I needed you most.

I was only thirteen (13) still a baby.

I got accused of being the reason, beaten because he truly believed it.

Now I am scarred for life.

I have dreams of the times before you were gone.

Dreams of the family everyone envied.

Now this family is just another statistic, just another number.

I truly wish it never happened.

Wish I was still “part of that ‘Happy family’”.

But times have changed.

Marriages don’t last, families break up, kids always in the middle, always alone.

What Gives Me Strength

Allison

Age 17

I get lost in your beautiful eyes,
Think of you everyday and every night.

You mean the world to me,
That's what you will always be.

You are unable to be touched.
Just know I miss you so much.

Can't touch you with my hands,
My only wish is that I can.

Your kisses make me want to cry.
This feeling scares me deep inside.

My heart is in your hands.
Your every wish is my command.

I can hardly wait to see you,
The feeling I feel for you is true.

My love for you flows on and on,
With you I feel a lovely bond.

I'm on a river,
Need to keep rowing,
You give the strength to keep on going.

"I've realized now that I am not alone and I am not the one you left. I'm the one you came back for and you've always been here when I needed you." Allison says she never actually went to her mom's custody/child support court hearing. "All I know is that my mom got full custody of me. That means a lot to me. Especially when she wasn't part of my life for close to 2 years. She wants to try to make up for it and I respect her for that." Allison lives in Santa Barbara County with her mother.

The Flowing Plains

Miles

Age 17

The flowing plains
The rain falling to earth like liquid jewels
The “Pitter-patter” on the muddy shore
Of the dusty river
The clouds of the atmosphere part
And the sun streaks across the tidal waves of
mountaintops

Miles is a student at Butte County’s Table Mountain School, a court community school for youths in juvenile hall. This poem is one of many published in *Unlocked Thoughts: An Anthology of Poetry and Art*, which the students published in 2005.

Our Dimension!

Rafael
Age 18

We all have the power to feel,
Desire to succeed,
Ambition to live.
Through the eyes of us,
Times come and pass,
Isolation in the winds.
Even in the darkness of the heart,
It's beating sound carries light.
We see our tears,
They carry life,
They carry hope,
They carry passion,
They carry love,
They carry hate,
They carry true.
Into the infinite and the eternal,
Our lives are ours,
We define our cause
We claim our present; we seek to the future,
We make the choice,
Whether right or wrong,
We choose to Be,
We choose to be Unique,
The strength of one, the strength of all,
It lies within the human soul
We are Unique,
See for it not in the world, find in your Soul!
Our strengths, our hopes are designed by our Wills!

"I have passed through court hearings for the past 6 years. I have an understanding of what it does, of what it seeks. I have learned from it. I have gained friendships in court and with those who work in court. Through my time in court, I have altered my ideas, thinking and ways of looking upon my own faith. I have goals, ideas, and dreams [gained] through court and also the ability to think for myself." Rafael's Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) entered his poem in the contest.

My Baby Boy

Donesha

Age 18

I was living up life
Then I got a big
Surprise
He was my light but it was still dark to me.
When he came I was supposed
To see what really life
Meant to me
Even though he did help me
To learn new things
I still
Didn't learn enough to be
What he needed me to be and to also
Get out them streets
I always new that he loved me
Because I as all h needed
He hated when I would leave
And don't say bye,
Don't come back
Then let the day's go by
I don't come back to say
Hi
But now I realize
That he's mine all mines.
I love my baby boy and he love's me.
Son you are my pride and joy
And
I promise not to leave any more.

Love Mommy

Donesha did not enter the juvenile system in San Bernardino County until after having her son. Her first offense was stealing a ring at a mall, for which she was put on probation. She was then caught "smoking weed" and was sent to her first placement. She left her second placement without permission, though she turned herself in two weeks before her 18th birthday. Now that she is 18, she says she is "ready to leave and do what I need to do. To go to school and get a job for me and my son."

What Gives Me Strength

Jorge
Age 19

As a kid coming up all I ever wanted was a father.
A father that would help me up when I fall and give
me the strength I need to carry on. A father that
would always have my back if I'm right or wrong.
I wanted a Dad that would become more than just
A friend but a Hero that would protect me till the
End. A Dad means more than anything in the
world or at least I thought it did. As a kid growing
up I was stuck on wanting a father I did not
realize what my mother did. The father I always
wanted, the dad I needed in my life ended up
to be my mother the whole time. She helped me up
when I was down and gave me the strength I needed
when the longing for a father held me to the ground
She smiled with joy when I did right and stood by
my side when wrong came in to sight. She loved
and gave me all the strength I would ever need.
It is always the things we know we have. We
don't want so we find are self walking on a dead
end dream only to find a broken heart. I'm
thankful for my mom because just one thought
Of her gives me all the strength I need and
takes away all the pain of my broken heart when
I got caught in the dead end dream.

"When I was gong to court it was hard because I didn't now what was going to happen."
Jorge is in the delinquency system in San Joaquin County and says that "if it was not for
my mother giving me the strength I would have gone crazy and really went to the pin."

My Family

Tin
Age 19

My mother's a star
Who shines brightly at night
To her I look up
For my strength and might
My father's a hero
Who conquer my fear
On him I rely
To wipe away my tears.
My brother's a friend who
Comfort all over
I ask him for help
When I'm in danger.
My sister's a model
Who leads by example
Her action I follow
To stay out of trouble.
My family's my life
When I'm with them
I shine bright.

“Going to court is the most stressing time of my life. You don't know what to expect from the judge. I pray every night and day for sentence. Hoping for a short time, but what I've done to my victim will not make up for my stay in jail. Now that I'm locked up I realized what I did was inhuman. I learn from my mistake and will not do such a thing again.” Tin is in the delinquency system in Orange County.

What is Strength?

Willis
Age 21

What gives me strength? . . .
Knowing that I've been given a second chance to change my life . . .
What gives me strength? . . .
Knowing what hasn't killed me, only makes me stronger . . .
What gives me strength? . . .
Knowing that I sincerely want to change and become some one in life . . .
What gives me strength? . . .
Knowing where others have failed, I will succeed . . .
What gives me strength? . . .
Seeking new opportunities for myself in society . . .
What gives me strength? . . .
Knowing that I'm not the same person I use to be . . .
What gives me strength? . . .
Knowing that one day my positive energy will pay off for me . . .
What gives me strength? . . .
Knowing no goal is impossible as long as you work hard and put your mind to it . . .
What gives me strength? . . .
Knowing one day when I reach my goals, I'll be at peace . . .
That's what gives me strength? . . .

"My court experience was a very eye opening experience. When you are an immature adolescent you are not aware of all the damage you cause by committing crimes. I was charged as an adult at the age of 15 When your in court it isn't fun at all because you are looked upon as a danger to your community also to society. [Since being] committed to the California Youth Authority, I have been given a second chance to change my life."

The Firefly

Marika

Age 22

A little child lies in bed
she imagines life as it could be
will she ever break these chains
her fear and pain
are all she seems to know

But like a firefly in darkness
there is a spark of hope
someday I'll be happy
someday I'll be free
I'll be all grown up
and no one can stop me

She waited and waited
the firefly lingering nearby
and when death seemed the only comfort
the gentle glow brought strength for one more day

Now I'm all grown up
and still I wait
praying that the firefly is really there

Marika has been incarcerated in the Ventura Youth Correctional Facility since she was 16 for shooting and killing her stepfather. She had made repeated, failed attempts to have herself and her brothers removed from the home and his abuse.



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The artwork, "Snow Flowers," on the cover of this booklet was created by Jared, age 12. Jared also entered a poem in this year's contest, which appears on page 2.



